Mixtec Transnational Identity. *Laura Velasco Ortiz*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005. 234 pp.

Guillermina Gina Nunez
University of Texas, El Paso

The field of transnational studies has contributed to our understanding of globalization's fragmenting impact on local communities. Transnationalism refers to the process through which migrants cross national boundaries while synthesizing two societies into a single social field. Migrants in transnational networks are linked to their countries of origin and to the countries to which they have migrated. The every day lives and socio-political practices of individuals and organizations define the transnational and social processes of displacement and re-articulation that take place within well-defined social arenas. Laura Velasco Ortíz's *Mixtec Transnational Identity* examines the Mixtec migrant organizations from Oaxaca and their leaders in both Baja California and California. This work contributes to the literature on transnationalism and U.S.-Mexico borderlands. It shows how ethnic consciousness and political organization among indigenous communities straddling the Mexico-U.S. border is shaped and negotiated.

Velasco Ortíz's work chronicles the formation of transnational organizations, and the processes involved in the emergence of organic intellectuals. Her fieldwork allowed her to gather a diversity of data. She provides keen insights into the organizational practices of political and

working class social movements largely based on participant-observation, oral histories, and historical analysis. The incorporation of life histories and narratives of key intellectual leaders in these transnational organizations provides a humanized perspective of the social complexity involved in complicated political negotiations. Although there is mutual collaboration among the various indigenous organizations, there is also tension and conflict. Along with Mixtec organizations, such as the *Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional*, Velasco Ortíz examined a total of 14 organizations, a number of which were organizations comprised of Zapotecs and Triquis and their pan-ethnic alliances, and 24 community leaders.

This study pays particular attention to the role ethnicity plays in defining individual and organizational social agency, and how these entities contribute to social, economic, and political change in their communities. Velasco Ortíz views the social construction of ethnic boundaries and identities as necessary steps to participating in social organizations. In examining the organizational practices and ethnic identity of transnational migrant organizations, the author addresses the structure-agency dichotomy discussed by scholars of ethnicity based on two processes: (1) the constitution of social agents, and (2) the constitution of identity boundaries. Throughout her discussion of the effects of migration on ethnic identity, Velasco Ortíz provides insights into the educational and social capital community leaders carry with them as they challenge territoriality as the natural basis for identity.

Moreover, Velasco Ortíz's attention to gender highlights the internal boundaries imposed by native, national, and international ideologies. She refers to the public versus private dichotomy often critiqued by feminist scholars who question this model for examining the complex roles of men and women in political organization. While the majority of community leaders or intellectuals she interviewed were males, Velasco Ortíz also interviewed females who contested their place and participation in political functions inside and outside of their homes. She presents a number of ethnographic examples of gendered contestation, documenting how women defied their sexual differentiation and questioned and negotiated their gender subordination in organizations and in the political process in general.

Velazco Ortíz sustains that community is a symbolic construction in a constant state of change. Her work illuminates the ways in which transnational communities become socially constructed spaces defined by the actions of migrations and are sensitive to capital and government policies. The principal contribution of this work consists in showing that transnational communities are neither homogenous nor autonomous spaces, but spheres constructed through resistance, social and political organization, and ethnic, class and gendered negotiations. Velazco Ortíz discusses human creativity as well as the tension involved in the ethnic dimensions of local social orders. Her work is based on well articulated chronological documentation of how transnational Mixtec organizations negotiate their ethnic, class, political, and gendered identities. Participation in community life has strong implications for social rootedness and permanence of migrant indigenous populations. This first-rate sociological study illustrates the maturation in empirical research on transnational migration. Its focus on the complexities of ethnicity,

power and organizational culture provides a rich and complex contribution to the study of how groups establish roots and branch out to one another while transforming and re-articulating social and political spaces—an approach that has been far too often ignored in the transnational literature.